

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 407 629

CG 027 711

AUTHOR Young, Jen; And Others
TITLE The Effectiveness of High School Peer Helper Training.
PUB DATE 97
NOTE 9p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143) -- Tests/Questionnaires (160)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adolescents; Conflict Resolution; *Helping Relationship;
*High School Students; High Schools; Interpersonal
Communication; *Peer Counseling; *Program Effectiveness;
Self Esteem; *Training
IDENTIFIERS *Training Effectiveness

ABSTRACT

Although anecdotal evidence supports the usefulness of peer helper programs and related training, there is little published quantitative data on the effectiveness of peer helper training. The purpose of the present study was (1) to examine whether or not training for a peer helper program provided student mediators with the essential skills needed to counsel other students, and (2) to assess the overall confidence level of the peer helper trainees. A survey was administered to peer helpers immediately before and after training. The participants came from grades 8-11 and most were from middle- to upper-class backgrounds. The questionnaire that was used provided a baseline measurement of the peer helpers' confidence levels. It was hypothesized that the peer helper training would prepare the selected students to mediate conflicts in the high school. The most important finding of the survey was the significance of the perceived value of the training program; students felt adequately prepared to be effective peer helpers. Trainees also reported increased closeness with each other following the training weekend; training helped break down misconceptions about others and enhanced students' pursuit of a common goal. (Author/RJM)

* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *

The Effectiveness of High School
Peer Helper Training

Jen Young
Orie V. Kristel IV
and Catherine Chambliss, Ph.D.

Ursinus College

1997

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS
MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

C. Chambliss

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

- ☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
- ☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

- Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Abstract

Although there has been much anecdotal evidence providing support for peer helper programs and related training, there is little published quantitative data on the effectiveness of peer helper training. The purpose of the present study was to examine whether training for a peer helper program provided student mediators with the essential skills needed to counsel other students, as well as to assess the overall confidence level of the peer helper trainees. It was hypothesized that the peer helper training would be effective in preparing the selected students to mediate conflicts in the high school. Comparison of pretest and posttest scores revealed significant changes in perceptions of program effectiveness and the cohesiveness of the peer helper group following training.

The Effectiveness of High School

Peer Helper Training

The current trend in managed care involves an increasing reliance on paraprofessional therapists. Research has shown that these paraprofessional providers' counseling efforts tend to produce results similar to those of doctoral level providers, at significantly reduced cost (Worthington, Kurusu, McCullough, & Sandage, 1996). Consistent with this, fiscally constrained secondary schools have increasingly turned to the use of paraprofessionals to address their students' psychological needs. In addition to community volunteers and graduate student interns, many high schools have instituted the use of peer helper programs. Such programs use training to develop an internal cadre of skilled student peers who are prepared to assist their fellow students with conflicts (Benson & Benson, 1993).

Due to its utility in aiding the resolution of conflicts among students and freeing school staff to perform more academic tasks, peer helping has become a popular method of dispute resolution in the 1990s (Araki, 1990; McFarland & Culp, 1992). Other pragmatic reasons for using a peer helper program are to improve school-based support for children with social/emotional/behavioral problems, to enhance prevention by shifting student norms, and to reduce the need for crisis intervention by the school's support services. Specific aims for adolescent peer helpers include building confidence, improving social skills, and promoting acceptance of others as individuals with unique strengths and weaknesses (Burrell & Vogl, 1990).

Although there has been much anecdotal evidence for the effectiveness of peer helper programs and related training, there is little published quantitative data on the effectiveness of the training programs. Therefore, an outcome

Training Effectiveness 4

assessment measure was designed to examine whether training for a peer helpers program effectively provided student mediators with the essential skills needed to counsel other students. The overall confidence level of the peer helper trainees was also assessed. It was hypothesized that the training would be effective in preparing the selected peer helpers to mediate conflicts in the school, as operationalized by the students' responses to an assessment survey. Moreover, an increase in perceived group cohesiveness was expected after the training program.

Method

Subjects

A survey was administered to the peer helpers immediately before and after training. These students were selected by student and teacher nominations to be the school's first peer helpers. The participants were proportionally representative of the classes in the school (eighth to eleventh grade). Equal numbers of males and females were involved in the training. Most subjects could be classified as coming from middle to upper class backgrounds, and were demographically reflective of the school.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire was designed to provide a baseline measurement of the peer helpers' confidence levels, as well as to evaluate the perceived effectiveness of the peer helper training session. The questionnaire included six items designed to measure the students' perceptions of their readiness for becoming a peer helper, and a section of demographic questions (Appendix). The experimenter-designed questions were examined for construct and face validity, and found to be acceptable. A number of the items' wordings were reversed to detect acquiescent response sets. A separate answer sheet was used for the

Training Effectiveness 5

recording of each subject's responses to the questionnaire. The same general questionnaire was used for the post training measurement.

Procedure

Trainees were asked to complete the questionnaire immediately prior to their participation in the weekend training program. Although social desirability response bias was not expected to be a problem with this sample, the questionnaires were answered anonymously and individual responses remained confidential. Following completion of the pretests, the peer helpers were bussed to a remote location where they underwent a weekend-long training program under the leadership of trained peer helper adult counselors. Immediately after the completion of the training weekend and their subsequent return to the high school, the questionnaire was readministered. The sheets were then collected from each subject, and the results were compiled into a data file.

Results

Several significant differences between scores on the pre and post training measures were noted. A t-test examining perceived effectiveness of the training weekend yielded a $t(43)=3.36$, $p<.001$, showing that the training increased the helpers' confidence. A t-test for the peer helpers' reported degree of readiness to help their peers was also significant ($t(43)=2.14$, $p<.05$). Other significant findings relevant to this research study referred to changes in the perceived closeness of the peer helpers themselves ($t(43)=2.14$, $p<.05$) and to the perception of peer helpers that were disliked and could cause problems to peer helper cohesiveness ($t(43)=-2.25$, $p<.05$).

Discussion

It was hypothesized that the peer helper training would prepare the selected students to mediate conflicts in the high school. The results from the

Training Effectiveness 6

peer helper training measures were statistically significant, and provide encouraging support for the effectiveness of the training program. The most important (statistically and realistically) finding was the significance of the perceived value of the training program. After spending the weekend in a highly intensive environment, the students' felt adequately prepared to be an effective peer helper. This finding was buttressed by the significance of the students' increased desire to help the student body.

Other interesting findings involved the effects of the training weekend on group cohesiveness. A number of students initially expressed some anxiety over the presence of particular students they had previously disliked, and whom they believed could pose a threat to the effectiveness of the training. However, the results indicate that the training was successful in breaking down some misconceptions commonly found in an adolescent milieu, and replacing them (at least temporarily) with focus on a common goal and accompanying constructive perceptions of peers. These results were corroborated by the findings of increased closeness among trainees following the training weekend.

The results from this study suggest that peer helper training significantly benefits the participants. Further studies will measure the effectiveness of the actual peer helper program in operation at the suburban high school. The results from this work in progress will provide an interpolative measure of the effectiveness of the peer helper training -- if the program is a success, at least part of the success can be attributed to the effectiveness of the training sessions. The impact of the training weekend on the perceived closeness of group members provides support for other programs that entail weekend excursions, such as teen retreats or encounter groups.

References

- Araki, C.T. (1990). Dispute management in the schools. Mediation Quarterly, 8, 51-62.
- Benson, A. & Benson, J. (1993). Peer mediation: conflict resolution in schools. Journal of School Psychology, 31(3), 427-430.
- Burrell, N. & Vogl, S. (1990). Turf-side conflict mediation for students. Mediation Quarterly, 7(3), 237-250.
- Mcfarland, W. P. and Culp, W.H. (1992). Interpersonal skill training for the effective conflict resolution. The School Counselor, 39, 304-310.
- Worthington, E., Kurusu, T., McCullough, M. & Sandage, S. (1996). Empirical research on religion and psychotherapeutic processes and outcomes: a 10-year review and research prospectus. Psychological Bulletin, 119(3), 448-487.

Appendix

This survey affects you! Please read it carefully. Results from this survey will be used to evaluate the effects of the training program! Your response is confidential and anonymous.

Read each question carefully. Write your responses with a #2 pencil, filling in the space on the answer sheet that matches your response. Although you may have seen some of the questions before, make every attempt to answer the questions as honestly as possible.

1. I am:
A. Female B. Male
2. I am in grade:
A. 8 B. 9 C. 10 D. 11
3. When I have a problem, I usually try to get help from:
A. a friend
B. a parent
C. an adult at school (teacher or counselor)
D. an adult outside of school (religious advisor, youth worker, neighbor, relative, family friend)
4. I have ___ brothers and/or sisters (include stepbrothers/sisters):
A. none (0)
B. one (1)
C. two (2)
D. three or more
5. My parents are:
A. married
B. separated/divorced
C. other (for example, if you stay with your aunt all the time)

Directions: For this section, please indicate the extent to which you agree with each statement, strongly agree (A), agree (B), neutral (C), disagree (D), or strongly disagree (E).

6. I feel that I could do a good job as a Peer Helper.
7. This training will help me to become an effective Peer Helper.
8. I did not care for some of the people at this training program, and I think it affected me in a bad way this weekend.
9. Although I may not have known or liked everyone here as a good friend, the training helped us grow closer and understand each other better.
10. I am looking forward to my role as a Peer Helper.
11. I truly hope I will be able to help my peers at PV next year by being trained this weekend (and at other training periods to come) to be a Peer Helper.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE



U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)



REPRODUCTION RELEASE

(Specific Document)

I. DOCUMENT IDENTIFICATION:

Title: <i>The Effectiveness of Peer Helper Training</i>	
Author(s): <i>Young, J., Kriatel, O., Chambliss, C.</i>	
Corporate Source: <i>Ursinus College</i>	Publication Date: <i>1997</i>

II. REPRODUCTION RELEASE:

In order to disseminate as widely as possible timely and significant materials of interest to the educational community, documents announced in the monthly abstract journal of the ERIC system, *Resources in Education* (RIE), are usually made available to users in microfiche, reproduced paper copy, and electronic/optical media, and sold through the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS) or other ERIC vendors. Credit is given to the source of each document, and, if reproduction release is granted, one of the following notices is affixed to the document.

If permission is granted to reproduce and disseminate the identified document, please CHECK ONE of the following two options and sign at the bottom of the page.

☒
↑
Check here
For Level 1 Release:
Permitting reproduction in
microfiche (4" x 6" film) or
other ERIC archival media
(e.g., electronic or optical)
and paper copy.

The sample sticker shown below will be
affixed to all Level 1 documents

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY <i>Sample</i> TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

Level 1

The sample sticker shown below will be
affixed to all Level 2 documents

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN OTHER THAN PAPER COPY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY <i>Sample</i> TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

Level 2

☐
↑
Check here
For Level 2 Release:
Permitting reproduction in
microfiche (4" x 6" film) or
other ERIC archival media
(e.g., electronic or optical),
but *not* in paper copy.

Documents will be processed as indicated provided reproduction quality permits. If permission to reproduce is granted, but neither box is checked, documents will be processed at Level 1.

"I hereby grant to the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) nonexclusive permission to reproduce and disseminate this document as indicated above. Reproduction from the ERIC microfiche or electronic/optical media by persons other than ERIC employees and its system contractors requires permission from the copyright holder. Exception is made for non-profit reproduction by libraries and other service agencies to satisfy information needs of educators in response to discrete inquiries."

Sign
here→
please

Signature: <i>C. Chambliss</i>	Printed Name/Position/Title: <i>Chair, Psychology Dept</i>	
Organization/Address: <i>CATHERINE CHAMBLISS, Ph.D. Dept. of Psychology Ursinus College Collegeville PA 19426</i>	Telephone: <i>610 933 1570</i>	FAX: <i>610 489 0627</i>
	E-Mail Address: <i>cchambliss@</i>	Date: <i>1/22/97</i>

acad.ursinus.edu

(over)

III. DOCUMENT AVAILABILITY INFORMATION (FROM NON-ERIC SOURCE):

If permission to reproduce is not granted to ERIC, or, if you wish ERIC to cite the availability of the document from another source, please provide the following information regarding the availability of the document. (ERIC will not announce a document unless it is publicly available, and a dependable source can be specified. Contributors should also be aware that ERIC selection criteria are significantly more stringent for documents that cannot be made available through EDRS.)


Publisher/Distributor:
Address:
Price:

IV. REFERRAL OF ERIC TO COPYRIGHT/REPRODUCTION RIGHTS HOLDER:

If the right to grant reproduction release is held by someone other than the addressee, please provide the appropriate name and address:

Name:
Address:

V. WHERE TO SEND THIS FORM:

Send this form to the following ERIC Clearinghouse:

ERIC/CASS School of Education Park 101, UNCG Greensboro NC 27412

However, if solicited by the ERIC Facility, or if making an unsolicited contribution to ERIC, return this form (and the document being contributed) to:

ERIC Processing and Reference Facility
1100 West Street, 2d Floor
Laurel, Maryland 20707-3598

Telephone: 301-497-4080
Toll Free: 800-799-3742
FAX: 301-953-0263
e-mail: ericfac@inet.ed.gov
WWW: <http://ericfac.piccard.csc.com>